

## Open Heart, Open Arms

**And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.**  
(1 Peter 4:8 *KJV*)

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 4:1–11

**Song:** “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

The speaker at our women’s event shared a story about how she had avoided a woman in her church, believing her to be cold and distant. One Sunday, that woman demonstrated a genuine concern for our speaker, who had been suffering with a physical issue for months but hadn’t told anyone in the church. Tears flowed as our speaker told this sister of her struggle with pain. With open hearts and open arms, they formed a deep friendship.

The believers Peter addressed were strangers in a foreign land, facing increased persecution. They could not allow personal offenses to detract from their sense of community. Peter urged them to cover such matters with fervent love. He went on to tell them how to grow this intense love: they were to build relationships through hospitality and to use their spiritual gifts to serve one another.

As believers, we too face increased persecution as strangers in a foreign land. We need each other’s support and encouragement. Let’s know one another more fully and allow fervent love to cover our differences, misunderstandings, and personal offenses.

**Father,** thank You for Your relentless love that covers the multitude of my sins. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

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November 17–23. **Sandra Vosburgh** is a Bible teacher with a heart for women’s ministry. She resides in South Carolina.

## The Tattered Flip Chart

**However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.** (1 Peter 4:16)

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 4:12–19

**Song:** “I’ll Tell the World That I’m a Christian”

Pierre lives in Burkina Faso, a country ravaged in recent years by Islamic terrorist groups. When the formerly devout Muslim embraced faith in Jesus Christ, he created a flip chart with pictures and illustrations to share the gospel with the country’s displaced refugees. Despite the risk to his life, Pierre remains unashamed to bear the name of Christ.

Persecution has long been the experience of those who proclaim the name of Jesus. All who live godly lives experience to some degree the hostility of those who walk in spiritual darkness. From ages past, when the prophets of God were killed, to this day, Christians are the targets of Satan’s attacks. In today’s passage, the apostle Peter warns of a coming fiery trial, a time of severe testing by those in authority over these scattered believers. Nero and the emperors who followed tried to stamp out the Light, but when persecution purified the church, it burst into flames and set the world on fire.

While heat from the Refiner’s fire grows warmer, we can stand confident that our God is with us, and He is for us. Whether we use a flip chart or our own example, let’s share the good news of Jesus Christ fearlessly and unashamedly with those still living in darkness.

**Father,** enable me to faithfully proclaim Your name and give You glory, even when challenged by opposition. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Personal Responsibility

**For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.** (Ezekiel 18:4)

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 18:1–9

**Song:** “Calvary Covers It All”

According to the lawsuit, two children climbed a fence to swim in an absent neighbor’s pool. One child drowned. The parents of the children had been distracted at the time, hosting a party. They sued the pool’s owner, even though the gate had been locked and a 6' fence surrounded the pool.

The Jews in Babylon had a proverb that placed the blame for their captivity on the sins of their fathers. Through Ezekiel, the Lord declared that each person is judged according to their own sins. These captives had forsaken the law of the Lord and turned to the idolatrous practices of the nations around them. If they had obeyed God’s word and honored His ways, they would have received His blessing, but they did not.

In his *Devil’s Dictionary*, Ambrose Bierce cynically shares society’s belief that responsibility is a burden easily shifted to the shoulders of others. Since the time of Adam, our tendency is to blame others for our own poor choices or mistakes. But when our actions bring hardship to ourselves or to others, we can acknowledge our wrongs and take responsibility. Let’s not look to others for a place to lay blame but look to God for forgiveness and restoration.

**Father,** thank You for the promise that when I acknowledge my wrong and confess my sin, You fully and freely forgive. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Divine Helper

**Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me.**  
(Psalm 38:21, *KJV*)

**Scripture:** Psalm 38:1–2, 10–22

**Song:** “Abide with Me”

When I became a follower of Jesus, I wondered why other Christians would pray for God to be with them. Hebrews 13:5 reminds us of God’s promise to never leave us or forsake us, so why would people pray for what God had already promised? But as I studied Scripture, I learned that there was much more to these prayers than asking for God’s presence.

David, the psalmist, keenly felt the consequences of his sin. His health had been sorely affected. Friends and family avoided him. Adversaries plotted his destruction. Grief tormented his soul. David acknowledged his sin, yet his challenges remained. He needed God to draw near, to assure him that he’d not been forsaken. Desperate for God to intervene in his circumstances, to fight on his behalf, and to grant victory over every scheme of his enemies, David invoked the presence of the Divine Helper.

When we ask God to be with us and with those we love, we are not speaking a generic phrase. We are calling for the fullness of God’s divine attributes to be at work in our lives. We seek His grace to sustain, His wisdom to guide, His strength to support, His power to enable, and His lovingkindness to comfort. To seek His presence is to seek Him.

**Father**, regardless of how I may feel, I know You will never abandon me or withdraw Your lovingkindness from me. Thank You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## We Can't. He Can.

**Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.** (Galatians 6:9)

**Scripture:** Galatians 6:1–10

**Song:** “Amazing Grace”

In 1980, minister Dick Woodward, founder of the Mini Bible College (MBC) program, was diagnosed with a degenerative spinal cord disease at the age of 50. He preached from a wheelchair until 1997, when he became bedridden. Until his death in 2014, he continued to broadcast his program. With his lessons translated into 41 languages, Woodward's reach extended around the globe.

When the apostle Paul addressed the believers of Galatia, he used a law of nature to illustrate a spiritual truth. What is sown is reaped. He urged Christ-followers to sow spiritual seed that would bring forth spiritual fruit. When we invest our strength and time in the spiritual welfare of others, we sow good seed. We are promised a spiritual harvest when we faithfully encourage and instruct our brothers and sisters in the Word of God. The temptation is to grow weary, particularly when our labors seem to produce little fruit.

Dick Woodward likely did grow weary, but he never stopped sowing the seeds of truth. He could have justified putting away his tools, yet he persevered. When we grow weary, whether by our own limitations or in response to limited fruit, let's resolve to sow good seed until the promised harvest comes.

**Father**, the grace You pour out on others is the same grace available to me. Remind me that You are not limited by my limitations. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Reflections

**“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”** (Matthew 7:3)

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:1–6

**Song:** “Search Me, O God”

A female bird repeatedly pokes at her reflection in my sliding glass door. Her babies are nestled in a bush nearby, and she instinctively believes the “other bird” is a threat to their safety. Like the hypocrite in today’s reading, she fails to recognize herself in the one she pecks.

Jesus told His disciples to be careful about how they judge others. He was not referring to spiritual discernment, which is necessary in the Christian life, but to harsh condemnation. God alone knows the motives of the heart. We do not have the ability or the authority to pronounce such judgment on a fellow believer. Jesus didn’t say we should not confront sin, but that we must first examine ourselves. Human nature tends to magnify the faults of others and minimize its own. Therefore, the purpose of this self-judgment is to ensure we are not guilty of the very fault we find in another.

According to the National Institute of Health, the cornea is one of the most densely innervated and sensitive tissues in the body. If we need to remove a speck from a brother or sister’s eye, let’s do so with the gentleness of an ophthalmologist and not with the zeal of a misguided bird.

**Father,** remove every self-righteous plank that hinders my vision. Help me to see clearly, judge righteously, and humbly seek the spiritual welfare of others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## A Watchman's Warning

**“Son of man, I have made you a watchman . . . ; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.”**  
(Ezekiel 33:7)

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 33:7–16a

**Song:** “I Love to Tell the Story”

A newspaper columnist wrote about the callous unconcern of the general public for those who are in real need. He referenced a certain woman who lay on a pallet, destitute and unattended, ill with pneumonia. Her furniture had been repossessed. The water company had turned off her water supply. The building supervisor had shut off her heat. Each person involved, although aware, remained indifferent to the poor woman's plight, and she soon died.

Like the watchman in Ezekiel's day, Christians have a responsibility to those around us. We are called to urge unbelievers to turn from their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ. He took the penalty for sin and offers eternal life to those who will put their trust in Him. Like the watchman, we do not bear the blame for those who fail to heed our warning. But if we fail to share the message, we are at fault.

How thankful we are for the watchmen in our lives who did not remain indifferent to our plight. As we meditate on the cross of Christ and the price He paid for our redemption, may the Lord burden our hearts for others with a renewed sense of urgency.

**Father,** lead me and give me the opportunity to speak Your message to someone today. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.